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SUBJECT: EMBASSY MASERU HONORS NATIONAL ADOPTION MONTH, DECEMBER 2009

¶1. Summary: Embassy Maseru held a roundtable discussion on the subject of Lesotho adoption procedures on December 2, 2009, in honor of National Adoption Month. Among the participants were members of Lesotho's Ministry of Health and Social Welfare, directors of a local child care facility, and a spokesperson from the adoption agency representing the U.S. in Lesotho adoptions. End summary.

¶2. Ambassador Robert Nolan began the session by emphasizing how important adoption is to both nations, the United States and Lesotho. He acknowledged the fact that in December 2008, the Government of Lesotho (GOL) lifted the suspension on adoptions to the United States, Sweden, Canada and the Netherlands, and most recently, designated Americans for African Adoptions as the agency to represent the U.S. in adoptions of children from Lesotho. He encouraged all parties to do what they could to facilitate the adoption of Lesotho's many orphans.

¶3. The discussion began with a heartfelt story by an American currently residing in Lesotho, who has experienced both the domestic and intercountry adoption process. He shared how he and his wife struggled with the judiciary system, yet eventually succeeded in adopting six of their eight children, two of which are Basotho. His description of the cultural impact on the child, the lack of education on adoption issues from the judiciary branches in different countries, and lack of communication between all parties involved in an adoption process, quickly led us to the next topic on the roles played by the parties involved.

¶4. It was widely agreed across the table that all members present at the meeting play a significant role, yet miscommunication or lack of communication continues to be a problem. The Department of Social Welfare (DSW) has progressed in recent years by establishing internal guidelines for both local and international adoptions. Out of the many child care facilities in Lesotho, DSW works closely with Beautiful Gate (BG), a facility known to advocate for the rights of children and the establishment of an effective adoption/foster care program in Lesotho. BG is one of the few facilities that provide residential and medical care to abandoned children, some of whom are HIV/AIDS infected, and orphans and vulnerable children. The directors offered suggestions to establishing a set of guidelines similar to those outlined in the Hague Convention on Adoption.

¶5. Given that Lesotho is not party to the Hague, Conoff outlined the differences that convention and non-convention countries have. Members of the DSW previously voiced their concerns on the lack of parent education and the possibility of child trafficking, however, they were amazed to learn that being party to the Hague would protect and cover these sensitive issues. The Director of DSW requested post's support in educating members of the judiciary branch by briefing them on the Hague, and the Ambassador agreed to advocate with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for Lesotho's accession to the Hague

convention.

¶16. The closing of the roundtable discussion ended with an agreement for all members present to communicate and collaborate on intercountry adoptions firsthand, at the time an organization is contacted. Conoff will draft informal guidelines that were mentioned by each agency present and distribute to all parties, so that standard procedures are followed when handling intercountry adoptions. Post will follow up with CA/OCS/CI for possible training on the Hague Convention for members of the GOL.

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